

will say that they are of framework, about 20 or 25 feet long, and about four feet wide. They are used for taking on and putting off freight. The Sultana had two of these. One lay on the bow of the boat, while the other was strung up with rope and tackle even with the cabin deck, and of this I shall make mention later on.

Shortly after the planks were on the bell in the engine-room rang, the great side-wheels began to plow, and the old Sultana glided out on the waters of the Mississippi on her doomed trip, with her precious freight of over 2,300 souls, consisting of paroled prisoners, guards, passengers, and crews.

It was quite late in the evening, and as she pulled out from her moorings we cheered and shouted.

After the boat was fairly under headway I crowded up the stairway leading to the cabin deck, and finding every space taken up, I edged my way up to the hurricane deck, below I found it crowded nearly as bad as above.

By this time we had lost sight of the lights of Vicksburg and were gliding along at a merry rate, the boat making her usual stops up the river. Many of us put in the time for an hour or two in social conversation, chatting of home and friends and the



N. H. KARNA.

many good things we would have to eat. We consoled ourselves that we had lived through it all, and were now in the land of the free and the home of the brave. We possessed no thought other than in a few days we would be at home, surrounded by friends, and feasting on the fat of the land. The night passed, and when morning came we were some distance above where the Kansas River empties into the Mississippi. Some time in the forenoon we reached Helena, where we stopped for a short time. While here an enterprising photographer took a picture of the boat with her mass of human freight on board. Several copies are still extant.

After leaving Helena we steamed on up the river without anything transpiring worthy of note until about 6 o'clock in the evening, when we have in sight of the city of Memphis.

After landing the cargo of sugar was unloaded, and we lay there until about midnight. Some time during the forenoon of the night I went up on the cabin deck. Just to the left of the stairway I found room and concluded to lie down for the night. I took off my shoes, hat, and blouse, and laid them under my head, so that they might not get up and walk off before morning, which was apt to happen. There was just room for me to lie down, as I touched elbows with my comrades on either side.

I was soon sound asleep, but woke again as they pulled the heavy planks on board preparatory for leaving. I heard the bell ring and the wheels surge, and I knew that we were in motion again. It was about midnight, and the night was black with darkness. We steamed up the river about a mile, and then crossed over on the Arkansas side to take on some coal.

As soon as the boat was under headway again I fell into a sound slumber, and was soon lost in sweet dreams. One by one the hours passed. It was now half past two o'clock in the morning, and we had only made the distance of eight miles above Memphis. Every one but the crew were now in their soundest slumber. Suddenly there came a crash. Then followed the most horrible time I ever was witness to. In the noise of the explosion I had sprung to my feet. Everywhere steam was escaping, women were screaming, soldiers and crew cursing and swearing, horses neighing, mules braying, splinters flying—the once magnificent Sultana a wreck. Hundreds are drowning or have already perished.

I noticed the colored porter as he emerged from the smoke and steam, calling out that the boilers had blown up and the boat was now on fire. Oh, the thoughts that rushed through my brain for a moment as I stood on the cabin deck gazing out on the rough, cold waters! In an instant the thoughts of the 18 long months that I had struggled for existence in prison, of the friends at home waiting to receive me, and of the many prayers which I had every reason to believe had been offered up for my deliverance, swept over me. Now, just on the threshold of deliverance, must I die an awful death?

The river being so high, the water so cold, the night so dark, and the boat now on fire, made the chances for safety doubtful to the extreme. I did not have the slightest idea that a single soul would get away to tell the story.

In less time than it takes to narrate it, the fire was under headway, and I saw that I must make a choice of one of two things (as I thought), and that was, to either burn to death or drown. As I preferred the latter, I began to make preparations with the resolution in view to improve any and every opportunity that might present itself for my safety.

As I had taken off part of my clothing on lying down it did not take me long to divest myself of the remainder, but for fear that I might chill to death I left on my drawers and shirt, which proved to be of great value to me in the end. In my pocket I left a memorandum in which I had kept an account of all the important events while in prison, with day and date. This I valued very highly, but it was consumed along with the rest of my wardrobe. The river by this time was dotted far and near with human beings struggling for life. As I looked out to the right of the boat I saw three or four men fighting in the water with empty cracker-barrel. It was whirling like a hoop, and I don't if either of them was saved by it. Some had taken off all their clothing before jumping into the water and were trying to swim to shore, while others left all their clothing on. Some expert swimmers were struggling with others who could not swim, and all went down together. The heat and flames were now driving those nearest back, while those on the outer edge of the boat were crowded off in groups and left struggling in the water. Some climbed back by means of ropes only to be pushed off again. The first gangplank, which lay on the bow of the boat, was thrown off in the first of the excitement, and I do not know if any were saved by it or not. I

noticed some comrades cutting the ropes which suspended the second plank, and something impressed me that I must go with it. I picked up my hat, and pulled it down over my head. I don't know what my object was in putting on my hat at that time, unless I considered it as a sort of a life preserver, for I am sure that I was not bewildered at the time. I only had time to step over the railing on to the plank, when plank and all went crashing down on the heads of those on the bow of the boat below. As soon as we rallied from the fall, as many as could cling to the plank shoved it off into the water. The thought of that ice water makes me shudder yet. The fall of the heavy plank, and our weight with it, sent it far below the surface. I soon let go and came to the top for breath. In my effort to get to the top again, I struck several poor souls on their way to the bottom. As I went under my hat remained on top, but on my return I did not look for the hat. As I came up I saw the end of a scuffling projecting out of the water, and I clutched hold of it. A comrade on the other end bade me let go. As I did not want to arbitrate the matter with him there, I let go and swam out of the reach of the surging crowd, hoping to find some driftwood, which would be of some assistance.

By this time our gangplank shot up some distance below, and by the time I reached it 10 or 12 others were clinging to it. After getting hold of my hands I floated along with it, and in a few minutes I was looking for the shore on either side we could see nothing but the dim outlines of the timber between us and the horizon beyond.

Our first effort was to make the Tennessee shore, but after some time we found that the current was against us, and we were nearer the timber than at first. We then changed our direction and tried to make the Arkansas side. Our gangplank would have carried us all through if each one would have done his part and all had worked together, but some would climb on top, others would turn it over, and if anyone was caught underneath he was pretty sure to be drowned. Whenever I saw the plank was going to turn over I would let go, so that I might not be caught beneath it, and as soon as it had settled again would swim up and try it once more. Once as I was swimming back to the plank again one of our number, just in the act of drowning, caught me by the right hand with such a convulsive grasp that I could not release myself. Every time that I tried to jerk loose from him my head went under the water, and I thought my time had surely come. After finding it was impossible to loosen his hold, I made an effort to swim to the plank with him, and he never released his death-grip until I drew him up to the plank. But the poor fellow did not remain with us long; he became exhausted and chilled, and went to the bottom. There were many blood-curdling scenes to witness. Some were compelled to fight for their lives, in order to keep others off who had lost their reason and were trying to clutch them instead of endeavoring to save their own lives. Some even tried to drown others that they might have a better chance.

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## THE SOLITARY.

Juan Fernandez, the Probable Desert Island of Robinson Crusoe Fame.

Upon Juan Fernandez or Mas-a-tierra, a rock-bound, sea-girt islet in the Pacific Ocean, may be the name of Robinson Crusoe's island be fairly bestowed, for here did that hardy buccaner, Alexander Selkirk, of Largo, in Scotland, spend more than four dreary and lonely years, the fact suggesting to Defoe his immortal narrative.

It must be remembered, however, that other spots upon the earth's surface lay claim to Robinson Crusoe, too. Thus Tobago, in the West Indies, is held to be the true Crusoe's isle; and during the last Colonial and Indian Exhibition held in London there was sent an exhibit from little Tobago a skull actually purporting to be that of Robinson Crusoe's historic goat!

But the Scotch pirate certainly suggested his romance to Defoe, wherever that author may have chosen to lay his plot; and for this reason Juan Fernandez must be interesting to all readers, from the crowns of his volcanic narrative.

"Selkirk's Lookout," is a rugged mountain peak to the silver surf which breaks eternally upon its shores. Amidst the island's forests of tree-ferns did Selkirk live, build his habitation, and cultivate the soil; from its mountain caps must his weary eyes have sought a sail through the long years of lonely waiting.

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